

# Who does the multi-faith prayer room belong to?

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A religious conflict has arisen at a Dorset hospital over plans to convert its Christian chapel into a "multi-faith centre". The changes are part of a £30million refurbishment of St Ann's psychiatric hospital in Poole.

The Reverend Stewart Timbrell — who raised £15,000 for furnishings to the hospital chapel — is furious at the plans and claimed it was another example of Christianity being marginalised. He has worked at the chapel for fifteen years.

The chapel may now be dismantled and all Christian artefacts removed so the room can be used by people of different religious beliefs. Christians will be allowed to bring in crosses and Bibles with them – but must take them out afterwards.

Mr Timbrell told the local paper: "They are going to put a multi-faith room in instead, which is a room with nothing in it, so it won't offend anybody. With mental illness, people are very conscious of empty space within themselves. To put in an empty space devoid of any vestige of Christianity is outrageous."

A spokesman for the Dorset HealthCare Trust said a Christian altar and embellishments that had been donated to the chapel would not be destroyed but the trust is looking for a suitable new home for them.

The Reverend Michael Oates, the trust's co-ordinating chaplain, added: "There will be a multi-faith, spiritual space to meet the needs of our multicultural service users. We will retain the well-attended Sunday services as well as encourage opportunities for Christian worship."

Terry Sanderson, president of the National Secular Society, said: "This shows the controlling, exclusive and selfish face of Christianity. But Mr Timbrell will soon see that other faiths, too, like to have things entirely to themselves, and there will soon be arguments over who the space belongs to. Muslims have shown in other hospitals and institutions that they are even less inclined than Mr Timbrell is to share worship space." See [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) for examples.

See also: [\*A multi-faith Songs of Praise – not on my watch\*](#)

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